

THE ARCHBISHOP'S 2023 ANNUAL SUMMER ESSAY CONTEST

Second Place Winner

Priest/Deacon

Great Commission Anglicans

The Rev. Seth Williamson

I am an Anglican priest living in Texas trying to plant a new church and one of my favorite pass times is to show people Bishop Miguel's church in Brazil on Instagram. Allow me to explain. We are committed to the Prayer Book and the other Anglican formularies. We desire to honor our bishops and walk in the Old Paths of our tradition. However, we minister in a land filled with non-denominational churches. The folks who attend these churches are in the lineage of people who have made conscious decisions to not have bishops, not have a written liturgy, and to be as casual as possible to attract new guests. I have no animosity in my heart for these brothers and sisters but when they meet me their antenna goes up and they are on the defensive. I wear a collar, I have vowed obedience to a bishop, and pray words written by someone else.

Whenever people hear the word "Anglican" what do they imagine? If they even know who we are they usually imagine big cathedrals with stained glass and golden pipe organs. They imagine complex rituals and British accents. They imagine progressives who have more degrees than they have sense. So, when they meet me, a former Baptist turned Anglican church planter, they are usually confused. And to add to this confusion I like to show them Bishop Miguel's church on Instagram. If you have never seen his church let me describe it to you. It's a warehouse type building with seats instead of pews. They have a big LED screen in the background, they wave flags and dance during their worship, they sing the latest releases from CCM artists, and the right reverend Miguel usually preaches in

skinny jeans and an untucked clergy shirt. My Texas compadres look at this and scratch their heads, “This is an Anglican church?” And I just smile. It is certainly something they are not expecting. It breaks the mold of what they have come to predict. And yet, this church in Brazil is indeed a faithful, Prayer Book, Anglican church.

As Global Anglicans today we too live in a state of confusion. We are confused about the identity of Global Anglicanism. Canterbury has betrayed us, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America has left the straight and narrow, and now we have this new kid on the block known as the Anglican Church in North America made up of a bunch of former Episcopalians as well as cradle Presbyterians, Baptists, and Charismatics. For centuries it seemed easy enough to know who an Anglican was. Their clergy wore surplices, they answered to Canterbury, and their churches smelled like incense. But now all that is in question, and we all want to know, “Who are we?” So that is what I aim to do today. I aim to help you with this confusion and tell you what it means to be a Global Anglican today. And in order to do that I would like you turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28:16-20...Matthew 28:16-20.

In this passage Jesus has just risen from the dead. His disciples, who had previously run for their lives, were now gathered together once again. After 27 chapters of Matthew discussing the nature of the Kingdom of God the Apostle is ready to close his writings with this final story. The story that proceeds the Church coming on to the scene. As we go through this passage today it is important to remember that above all else, Anglicans are just Christians. And so, we are going to look at the text, then discuss its theology, and then apply it to our lives. Hopefully, this will clear up any confusion.

So first, what did Matthew write to his contemporaries? The Risen Jesus commissioned his faithful followers to make new disciples...The Risen Jesus commissioned his faithful followers to make new disciples. Let’s look at verses 16-

17, “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.” So Matthew is giving us some important details about the state of the disciples at this point in time. First, he reminds us that only 11 disciples remain after his Gospel has unfolded. Judas betrayed Jesus. Instead of living for the Kingdom of Heaven he chose money and worldly political power. Judas had been baptized, he had spent three years under the tutelage of Jesus, and even after all that he chose 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave, over the eternal Kingdom of God. Not everyone made it to this mountain. And even now some were still doubting. Matthew is honest about how hard it is to follow the risen Jesus. Even after seeing him rise there were still some who were skeptical. So essentially Matthew is telling us there are two groups in the Church: those who believe and thus obey and those who doubt and thus betray.

Now that Jesus has them all gathered together, he says this in verses 18-20, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” In the previous passages we see Jesus resurrected from the dead. He has taken the penalty for the sins of all mankind, he drank fully of death, but now he is back. He bears fatal wounds and yet will never die again. And because of what he has done the Father has bestowed upon him all authority. There is no greater authority in heaven or on earth higher than Jesus. Not the pope, not science, not psychology, not your buddy, not your daddy, not some bishop, not your own opinions. Jesus is the final say for the entire cosmos. He is it. So, all of Creation should now give their full attention to what he is about to say next. What does he say? Does he tell us to go and become political activists? Does he tell us to write a bunch of books? Does he tell us to mind our own business? No, he tells us to go

and make more disciples. And the means by which we do that is by the Word of God and Holy Baptism. From this point forward these 11 disciples would go out and make so many disciples that they would outnumber the stars in the sky and the sand on the beach. They would do that by baptizing them in water in the name of the Triune God and then teaching them everything Jesus taught them which the Apostles summed up in the writings of the New Testament. Is it really that simple? Yes, it really is that simple.

And it might be simple, but it certainly is not easy. Judas didn't make it and many others didn't either. When we look across the Global Communion of Anglicans, we see many have decided to accept a slave's wage instead of inheriting the Kingdom of God. They have chosen political expediency, new philosophies, and comfortable lives over the way of the Cross. When Anglicans choose to teach that marriage can be anything they have left the teachings of Jesus. When Anglicans choose to criticize and doubt the Scriptures they criticize and doubt the Word made Flesh. When they choose to let people follow false gods in the name of tolerance, they have cast off baptism. They have chosen lesser authorities...but to be a Global Anglican today means to submit to the authority of the risen Son of God.

And that's the theological meaning of this passage: Faithful disciples make new disciples. Faithful disciples make new disciples. When we unpack what Matthew wrote we see that there really is no other way to be a faithful follower of Jesus. Faithful followers tell others what Jesus did. Jesus did not come simply as a moral teacher. He cast out demons and healed the sick. He did not come as a political revolutionary. He resisted his disciples when they tried to place Herod's crown upon his head. Jesus came to live the life we could not live and die the death we should have died. He came to fulfill the law and set captives free. He came to usher in a new way of life that would fulfill the longings of every human heart. And as faithful followers of Jesus we must be convinced that every word Jesus

spoke was good news. When Jesus told us that marriage is between one man and one woman until death, we must view this as good news. When Jesus told us that a good neighbor gives aid to his enemy, we must view this as good news. When Jesus told us that we should store up treasure in heaven, we must view this as good news. When Jesus told us to take up our crosses, leave our farms, leave our families, and follow him we must view this as good news. Why? Because a new Kingdom is coming, and he is the new King. We have the very words of life. The 66 books of the Old and New Testament are the greatest treasure to ever grace the face of this planet and because Protestants translated and mass-produced Bibles, we have shed salt and light unto the nations of this planet. No other philosophy or political revolution can claim that. Faithful followers tell others what Jesus did.

Faithful followers also baptize people in the name of the Triune God. Baptism is many things. It is first and foremost a promise from God to a sinner of a new birth. A birth made possible only by the power of the Spirit not the flesh. A new birth empowered by the resurrection of Jesus. It is also a renouncing of the flesh, the devil, and the world. It is turning your back on loyalty to any other name but the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those who accept the promises of God, signified in baptism, by faith are made new. They die with Jesus and now live a new life like his. It is the most radical act a person can undertake in their entire lives. In India it is fine if you believe in Jesus as a God amongst gods but once you get baptized then your house will be burned down, and you are an untouchable. Baptism means something, it means you are done with this world and now are part of a new regime. We are not looking for tepid commitment to some abstract notion of love and kindness but an abandonment of the ways of this world and an adoption of a new identity in Jesus Christ. Faithful disciples baptize.

Faithful disciples also teach others to obey Jesus. It is not enough to know what Jesus did or who he was you must also obey him. Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. On the night he was betrayed Jesus gave his disciples a

new commandment, “Love others the way I have loved you.” On its face this command does not sound new but when you look at how he qualified it you realize that Jesus has deepened the meaning and implications of the Law in a profound and radical way. Disciples are not just to “love”. They are not just to be nice, stay out of the way, and cheer you on. No, that is not the love of Jesus. Jesus sought the wellbeing of his neighbor. He followed the will of the Father all the way to the cross where he laid his life down for the salvation of his enemies. Obeying Jesus is to love others with this same kind of love. It is a call to come and die. A radical love that shines brighter than any other love in the universe. Disciples do not just learn a list of rules, they learn about the love of Jesus and obey him. That is what it means to obey Jesus, even to the point of death.

At this point you might be a tad bit frustrated with me. I have not tried to settle the debate between wearing an alb, a cassock, or jeans during the Eucharist. I have not praised pipe organs or decried guitars. I have not said whether a priest should be called Father, Pastor, Parson, or Reverend. I have not taken a position on which Prayer Book is best. The reason is because at this point in history these issues are not as important to the question of our identity as we would like to make them out to be. The Book of Common Prayer, our greatest contribution to the world as a movement, was written so that ordinary men and women could encounter the living Christ. It was written so that people might place their faith in Jesus and not in their own works of righteousness. The Articles of Religion allow room for local adaptation to the practices of our Church. Here’s the point: You might have all the outer trappings of an Anglican Church with all its glory, beauty, and influence...but if you do not have Jesus you amount to nothing at all. What is Global Anglicanism today? Global Anglicanism today is Great Commission Anglicanism.

So go make disciples around the globe. Make disciples around the globe. Great Commission Anglicans should be making converts all around the globe. We

should be calling individuals to repent of their sins and believe the Gospel. Baptizing them and teaching them to obey Jesus. Great Commission Anglicans should be planting churches all around the globe. Building up new outposts of God's Kingdom where the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered. Great Commission Anglicans should be establishing new dioceses all around the globe. We should have so many converts and so many churches that our bishops are so overwhelmed that they make more bishops who have new dioceses that can provide pastoral care to God's children all around the globe.

Disciples who are all in for Jesus will reproduce themselves through Gospel ministry; baptizing new converts and teaching them to obey Jesus. Global Anglicans are Great Commission Anglicans. Imagine a world where Anglicans are known not for their cathedrals but for their commitment to Jesus and his teachings. Where the stories told about us are not about our choirs but about the ordinary men and women who have touched lives with the Gospel and the love of Jesus. What a world that would be. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.